

Habichat

In This Issue

Autumn 2004



Native Plant Profile

Cats and Wildlife

Build a Hibernacula for Amphibians

Logpiles for Butterflies

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space **-IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Native Plant Profile.....Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)



Grows 40-50' height. Needs full sun. Will grow on a variety of soils and sites ranging from dry hillsides to swamps.

Flowers/Fruits: Inconspicuous flowers born in March, become fruit in September. Fruit persists into March, making cedars an excellent winter and early spring food source.

Landscape Uses: Screening, windbreak, backdrop for other plantings, sometimes used for topiaries.

Landscape Concerns: Do not plant near apple trees, quinces, hawthorns and mountain ashes. Cedars sometimes are hosts to "rusts", diseases that can infect the trees mentioned.

Cedars are Food for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Common Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (sap), Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe, Alder Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Common Crow, Fish Crow, Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Hermit Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cardinal, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Fox Sparrow. All use the fruit.

Cedars are Cover for: Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Screech Owl, Mockingbird, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, eastern Bluebird, Cedar waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Grackle, Cardinal, Pine Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Evening Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow.

Cedars are Nest Trees for: Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Common Grackle, Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow.

Note: Sixty-six species of wildlife use cedar.



Cats and Wildlife?

Many cats are enthusiastic predators. As backyard wildlife enthusiasts, many of whom own cats, we wonder how much impact pet or stray cats have on our native wildlife. It is difficult to invest in food and plants for songbirds and other small animals, only to have them become prey to wild or domestic predators. What impact do cats have as predators on wildlife populations?

There is a lot of myth surrounding the predatory impact of cats on wildlife. A number of studies have suggested that cats kill billions of small mammals and birds each year in the

U.S. However, these studies involve both a very small number of cats and their prey or cats outside the U.S. Factors that may be unique to cats in various habitats have not been included in these analyses.

Rural culture in the country has put the blame of declining quail, and pheasant populations on predators, including cats. Growing research indicates, however, that populations of these birds are declining due to habitat loss. And even in our own backyards, wildlife falls prey to many predators, including crows, hawks, fox, raccoons and opossums, as well as cats. Although predation may disturb us in our backyards, we just don't know if it is a major factor in the health of backyard wildlife populations.

One of the ecological issues pointed out by scientists regarding cats is that domestic cats are not native predators and have not evolved with their prey species. A fully functioning predator/prey relationship would sustain both populations.

This perfect fit may not exist for native wildlife in relation to our domestic cats. Internationally, domestic cats have contributed to the decline and even extinction of some species, especially in islands and other confined spaces. In the U.S., it is not as clear whether cats are having an impact on wildlife populations. However some of the species known to be favored cat food, including moles and shrews are of concern to wildlife biologists.

In Florida, cats have preyed upon burrowing owls, which prefer the loosened soil of new suburban development for digging burrows and laying eggs. In such localized populations of wildlife species, pressure from new predators could be disastrous.

There are an estimated 65 million pet cats in the U.S. About half of them are allowed outdoors. Even if each cat only killed one animal each year, the numbers are staggering; about 30 million small animals are killed each year. While it is not good science to make these kinds of guesses, it does give us something to think about. Without hard data for Maryland, or for the U.S. showing predation, let alone domestic cats, as a significant factor in the decline of wildlife, it is hard to justify the placement of such a burden on cats. Populations of bird species are measured annually in the US. Fish and Wildlife Service's Breeding Bird Survey. Decline of some species (wrens, woodpeckers, chickadees, etc) seems to be related to the availability of nest sites because they have to compete with more aggressive and non-native house sparrows and European starlings. Bird species that are declining are those that need large forests, meadows or wetlands.

Words of Wisdom for Cat Owners

1. Cats are safer indoors. An indoor cat is protected from traffic, cat fights, dogs, ticks, fleas, traps, poisons and diseases carried by other cats and wildlife.
2. Cats can be happy indoors. They can play, prowl, and pounce indoors with toys. Never leave cats outdoors unsupervised.

Indoors cats are healthier, happier and longer-lived than those who roam. For more information on making your outdoor cat a safe and happy indoor cat, read about the American Bird Conservancy Cat's Indoors! Campaign.

www.abcbirds.org/cats/

Build a Hibernacula for Amphibians

Anyone with a backyard pond knows that it does not take long for frogs and toads to find the oasis. Some of the amphibians that will visit a backyard pond include the Red-Spotted Newt, American Toad, Fowler's Toad, Green Frogs and Leopard Frogs. All pose no threat to pond fish. Predatory fish such as bluegills will eat amphibian larva. Most ponds only provide summer breeding habitat. Amphibians need places to hibernate as well, particularly in recently urbanized areas where natural habitats have been destroyed or severely degraded.



Green Frog
Photo by John White



Fowler's Toad
Photo by John White

The English Nature-Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales have these plans on how to build amphibian hibernacula on well-drained sites, poorly- drained sites and incorporated in a garden pond rockery.

Instructions

- 1) Dig a hole 18" deep – total area should be a minimum of two yards.
- 2) Fill with whole and half brick rubble so there are plenty of spaces among the rubble. Also mix leaf litter and bits of wood for humidity.
- 3) Place flagstone, concrete slabs or other flat heavy material covering the edge of the bricks. Make sure there are entry gaps leading under the flagstone.
- 4) Cover the entire area with soil making sure the entry gaps remain clear.
- 5) Top with straw.
- 6) For the garden pond, the edge can be planted with rock garden plants, such as sedums, as long as entry gaps remain open. Trees and garden plantings near the pond provide important habitat for herps during the terrestrial part of their life cycle.

Let us know how your hibernacula is doing!

Contact me: mmause@dnr.state.md.us

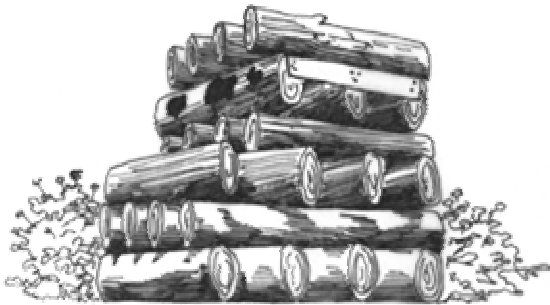
Logpiles for Butterflies

Butterfly hibernation boxes are often touted as a means of providing shelter for overwintering adult butterflies. Hibernation boxes in Europe have been successful, but do they work with American species? There still are no successes to date, and many national authorities such as the National Wildlife Federation and the North American Butterfly Association are conducting trials with various box types.



Question Mark Butterfly

Butterflies that overwinter in Maryland include anglewings such as Question Marks and Commas so named for the punctuation marks featured on their wings. These species search for exfoliating bark of trees, tree hollows and rock crevices or cracks and crevices in buildings to hibernate. Fermenting tree sap, animal dung, and rotting fruit are the main food items of these butterflies, although some will visit flowers.



Several years ago Wild Acres participant Fanilya Gueno sent information on how to build a butterfly logpile that may serve as roosting and overwintering habitat in lieu of a box. The logpile should be placed crosswise log cabin style to provide as many crevices as possible. The overall dimensions should be three to five feet high and three to six feet long depending on the space you have available.

Logpiles should be placed in the shade near nectar flowers and host plants. Question Mark host plants include nettles, hackberries, and hops. Nectar sources are aster, sweet pepperbush, rotting fruit and running tree sap. Comma host plants are hops, nettles and nectar sources are rotting fruit, showy stonecrop and dandelion.

If you build one of these logpiles the Wild Acres program would love to hear from you! Contact me at mmause@dnr.state.md.us and you might see your logpile and a story in Habichat.



Gray Comma Butterfly

Acknowledgements:

- Photos of Green Frog & Fowler's Toad, courtesy of John White.
- Photos of Eastern Red Cedars courtesy of Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.forestryimages.org
- Illustration of Log Pile courtesy of Edith Thompson.
- Photos of Question Mark and Gray Comma butterflies courtesy of Jerry A. Payne, USDA ARS, www.insectimages.org

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature!
www.dnr.maryland.gov

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

Habichat, the newsletter for Wild Acres participants, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Editor: Marilyn Mause

The facilities and services of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, physical or mental disability. This document is available in alternative format upon request from a qualified individual with a disability.

Wild Acres Program

Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service

Attn: Marilyn Mause

Gwynnbrook WMA

3740 Gwynnbrook Ave

Owings Mills MD 21117

410-356-0941

E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.
<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>**

